

collapsing, did more harm than good; yet even these parallel negotiations were recipes for letting important issues (British and French nuclear weapons, the sense in Western Europe and the Soviet Union that intermediate-range weapons can have a strategic function) fall between the cracks. In retrospect, even unratified SALT II looks over-ambitious or, at least, too complicated to be workable.

So is there nothing to be done? Far from it. For starters, why not agree to ratify the existing treaties on the maximum size of underground explosions and that which outlaws peaceful nuclear explosions except with advance notice and inspection by the other side? So much could be agreed next month. So too could be the principles of a treaty to ban the testing of anti-satellite weapons. The United States, which has made one test with an air-launched rocket, says the Soviet Union has already deployed such a system, but its performance is known to be so poor as to be irrelevant. The next best bet would be an attempt to define some of the untidy edges of the aborted INF and START negotiations, the manner in which bomber aircraft should be traded off against missiles of long or shorter range, for example, or the relevance of battlefield weapons to the strategic balance.

Haggling of that kind, however necessary, will cut very little ice with the non-nuclear members of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, who will be looking for limitations, even reductions, of strategic nuclear weapons and, now, assurance that the region beyond the atmosphere will not become a battlefield. They will not have either by next August. But what they could be offered is a promise to work towards a much simpler agreement than either SALT II or the kinds of treaties likely to have emerged from INF and START. Why not simply settle for a limit on the number of nuclear weapons (separate warheads) that each side may retain, letting it decide for itself how they should be deployed? Verification is the obvious difficulty, which could be overcome by a necessarily private exchange of information on past production of fissile material. There might then follow an agreement to a cut-off on military production of fissile material, a scheme once dear to the French. And if the limit on nuclear warheads were small enough, the case for the deployment of whatever emerges from the star-wars research would melt away. Is all that too much to hope for? By recent experience, it is too much. The crucial question, which may be answered next month, is whether Mr Shultz and Mr Gromyko, and their political masters, will be able to change the tone of arms control. □

Agency two-step hazard

Trading the White House science office for a Department of Science would be wrong.

FEW things give a President of the United States such a feeling of accomplishment, with so little actual accomplishment, as a reorganization of the executive branch. Bureaux become departments, offices are merged, titles appear and disappear, but nothing changes. It is a generally harmless exercise, one that gives the illusion of increased efficiency while keeping the chief executive too busy to make a genuine nuisance of himself.

But there is something else going on with the proposals leaking out about President Reagan's plans for reorganization. Presidential science adviser George Keyworth is one of those suddenly enamoured of a cabinet-level Department of Science, apparently undeterred that this idea has been proposed more than a hundred times in the past twenty years, according to the Congressional Research Service. The proposed Department of Science would assemble under it all the research agencies of the federal government except agriculture, defence and those inextricably bound to a regulatory function, which means the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration. So its components would include the National Science Foundation (now an independent agency), the National Bureau of Standards and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (which have always been somewhat out of place in the Department of Commerce), the National Institutes of Health, the

research components of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and of the Department of Energy (which department the Reaganites want anyway to eliminate) and the US Geological Survey.

Meanwhile, the murmurs are growing about plans drastically to reduce or even eliminate the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), the science adviser's office. The uncharitable (and probably wrong) interpretation is that Keyworth does not want any rivalry when he becomes the first Secretary of Science. A more likely interpretation is that even a vaguely independent office is a threat to the finely tuned political operations of the White House.

Although the idea of a Department of Science is probably less political (in the bad sense of the word) in origin, it is equally troublesome. And it is emphatically not in the category of cosmetic reorganizations. It has major consequences, not all of them good. To be sure, a cabinet-level department would, as they say in Washington, enhance the "visibility" of science; while OSTP, as an advisory body, can simply be ignored (and would be without the personal rapport that Keyworth apparently enjoys with Reagan), a Department of Science would have to be listened to in budget deliberations. And surely it would be better for science to have science budgets reviewed in the context of science budgets, not weighed against other pet projects that an agency may be pursuing. This would be especially true for space science, which must now compete within NASA against monstrosities such as the space station, created by NASA principally to perpetuate its institutional existence.

But the dangers are enormous. Unaesthetic though the present hodge-podge of science agencies may be, it serves a very real purpose in allowing expression for a diversity of views for the support of science. Putting them all together would render the entire federal research and development budget vulnerable to the sort of short-sighted political manipulations that, hitherto, have mercifully not afflicted more than one agency at a time. (Remember Research Applied to National Needs?) Worse, a cabinet-level department would be a perfect political plum for a political hack. Scientists may not always make good administrators, but they tend not to go far with half-baked schemes. The tradition of putting scientists in charge of science agencies has on the whole proved sound.

As for OSTP, it has obviously become a target for the political cosmeticians in the White House who ensure that the television cameras are always in the right place at the right time and that reporters are not given the opportunity to ask questions to which the President does not know the answers. As exceedingly careful as Keyworth has been to back the party line, even when that has meant making dubious statements about star wars and space stations, he is nonetheless regarded as an unnecessary risk by those who want all decisions made on the basis of political appearance. Similar reasoning explains the ambition to eliminate the Council of Economic Advisors, which has been on the hit list ever since Martin Feldstein dared to suggest that \$200,000 million deficits might have something to do with high interest rates. (The Council on Environmental Quality was all but eliminated four years ago, when the entire staff was fired and replaced by political familiars from Reagan's time as governor of California.)

OSTP, as now constituted, strikes a reasonable balance between window-dressing at one extreme and centralized control of federal research (which is what a Department of Science would do) at the other. The critics are right when they say it is weak because it is only advisory; that is what it should be.

Many who depend on one agency or another for their livelihoods will predictably oppose on narrow grounds any changes in the *status quo*. But they need not apologize for entertaining serious reservations about the proposal for a Department of Science, which should (and probably will) end up in the same place as it has on the 99 previous occasions it has surfaced. But the worrying aspect of these proposals is that they appear to be independent. OSTP could die an early death, and the plan for a Department of Science a lingering death in Congress. And then there would be nothing. □